St. Mary’s University GPDE 5256A

Wikis, Podcasts, and Online Learning for K-12 Classrooms

Summer 2013

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Part I:

21st century learners are a whole new type of student and “it seems evident that in this new era, social and economic success depends upon one's ability to quickly adapt to new tools and circumstances, to innovate, to think critically and creatively and discover new solutions to the problems…(Magana & Frenkel, 2009)” This quote really stood out to me because a lot of the students today are happy finding one answer to their problem. They solve it the quickest way they can and then they are done. They don’t have the drive to try it a new way or find a different solution to the problem. We need to instill this passion for learning in our students so that they are better prepared to step out into this 21st century world. I believe that a 21st century learner is someone who has a growth mindset and is always trying to discover new things. They are the type of student that questions a response and says, “Well could you do it this way?” They can be posed with one problem and come up with multiple solutions on how to solve it. A 21st century learner is a learner that is flexible and can adjust to things that come their way in not only education but in life.

Honestly, in some ways it is like it’s always been. There is a teacher in a classroom with students eager to learn. The teacher helps the students reach certain goals and celebrates with them when they do. Teachers have always helped their students prepare for the world beyond their classroom. What’s’ different now is our world and the way people operate in it. With the world changing as rapidly as it is, we need to change the way we teach so that we prepare our students as best as we can for this century, a century for 21st learners. It has been said that the top jobs our students will obtain after graduation do not even exist yet. We as teachers need to start now so that our students have the skills and the abilities to be contenders for those jobs.

When students walk into our classrooms, they have been exposed to so much social media and technology that they are almost “natives” in technology. “When kids that are used to wielding technology at home come to school and experience prescriptive, didactic teaching or do worksheets in isolation, they quickly lose interest, and become disengaged (Magana & Frenkel, 2009).” We need to use their knowledge of technology to our advantage and engage them with it. We need to close the gap between technology-less classrooms and the rest of the 21st century.

There are so many resources out there that our students can use in education. There are websites that allow students to create storybooks and videos. There are online forums that lead students into communication and dialogue with other classmates and teachers. Sites are available for students to log into and practice math facts, listen to stories read aloud, explore science experiments and explore the world. With all of these resources at our fingertips, our students are bound to be more engaged, but only if we use them.

I love the idea that as a teacher I can also be a 21st century learner. There are so many ways through social media and Web 2.0 tools that we as teachers can gain knowledge. As I was doing research on 21st century learners, I came across some great blogs where the authors read tons of articles about teaching in the 21st century and then posted all the good ones for everyone else to read. As a teacher with a hectic schedule, this is ideal for me because I can do professional development without sifting through articles that don’t relate. Also, I can see myself using YouTube often to watch videos about how to operate other Web 2.0 tools. It is a great source for instructional videos to further my knowledge and make my use of Web 2.0 tools smoother.

Twitter is one website that I would like to use more to further my professional development as an educator. I have a Twitter account but I have never really used it to follow educators and their posts. I’d like to be more aware of using Twitter for this purpose. Educators are all over the Twitter world and they have so many wonderful things that they find. Throughout the upcoming school year I hope to be active on Twitter and engage in some educational tweets!

I want my students to be able to watch me learn just like they do and maybe it will inspire a couple fix-mindset students to change to a growth mindset. They need to see me also being a 21st century learner. I believe that if students see the model, then they hopefully will follow in those footsteps.

Just thinking about all of these new resources and technologies, I get very excited for the new school year to start. I feel like by adding just a few of these 21st century learning tools into my classroom will make a huge difference with my students. I’m hoping that by using some of these technologies in the classroom that my students will be more engaged in their work and then, in turn, will learn more. They will be able to use the technological skills that they use when they are at home to create, build and analyze things in the classroom as well.

As a first grade teacher, I feel that I am lucky. My students are fresh into school and are eager to learn; they are excited about school and learning. Can you just imagine what kind of engagement I could have teaching these students 21st century learning skills? After much research, I believe that I can successfully prepare my students to live in this 21st century world, and it all starts in the classroom.

Part II:

As a teacher, I have lots of different files and photos that are stored on my computer. I started to use Dropbox last year for the first time but I plan to use it more regularly in the future to keep all of my files in order. It’s such a great application to have and use on a regular basis; “it is a cloud-based storage system that also provides file synching across multiple systems (Rapoza, 2011).” I use it to access files on my computer at school and then when I get home I can access those same files through the application. There’s no more forgetting files in either place because everything is right there in the cloud of Dropbox. The best part is that anything I put into Dropbox automatically gets sent to any device that my Dropbox is installed on. Talk about easy! This will be such a great tool to use.

Another Web 2.0 tool that I plan to use next year in my classroom is KeepVid. With this application I can download and save videos and audio directly from YouTube. This will be a great resource to have so that I can filter the videos before I use them in the classroom. My students love watching videos to better understand the concepts but sometimes I worry about using YouTube because of the other content that pops up when you use the site. With this application, I’ll be able to find the videos that I want to show and download them to my computer without any of the pop-ups and I can no longer use YouTube during a lesson. I can’t wait to start using this application and create my own library of videos to use in my classroom. One downside I can foresee is the time it is going to take me to find all the videos and get them into a library of my own. I know it’ll be eventually worth it and I can store the videos for years to come, I just have to find the time now to set them all up.

EasyCBM is a web-based assessment program. I used it for the first time last year but I’d like to be more diligent with it this upcoming year. It is a great resource to assess K-8 students on reading and math skills on the computer. Last year I used it only for the purpose of comparing levels and making choices about what students needed which interventions. I would like to maybe cut down on some of the paper and pencil assessments and switch to using these online assessments. Also, I’d like to use it more this year to have the students track their progress on the assessments. I think it would be motivational for my students to be able to see their improvements right there on the graph on their computer screen. This way the students can apply their understanding of the concepts in the assessment online and then analyze and evaluate their own data to set new goals for the next time.

Another tool that I am very excited about using next year is BrainPop Jr. My school has purchased a school wide account so that teachers and students can use this online resource. BrainPop Jr is a site that has educational videos on it for students from all discipline areas. After watching the video, there are quizzes, games and other activities students can do regarding the same topic that they watched in the video. In past years I have only used this as a whole group class activity. After learning more about 21st century learners, I think that I could have my students choose a topic to watch and then use the computer lab to learn about it. After they have learned what they can, students can report back to the class and teach it. I feel like by doing this I can give the control to my students and have them be responsible for their own learning. I would love to see what they remember and how they evaluated the information to find the most important pieces to share with the rest of the class. A challenge I see with letting my students use this site individually are the games and activities at the end. I would have to set clear expectations about what their goal was and that although they may learn more by doing that games and activities, they should not get stuck on them. I can see some of my students wanting only to master a level on a game and not engaging enough in the learning.

For my own professional development, I’d like to get into the habit of using Twitter and other blog sites to grow as a teacher. There are so many people out there who are willing to share their ideas and I would love to be able to keep up with those sites and try out some new things. I will also continue to use Pinterest. I use Pinterest all of the time to find new and exciting ideas for my students. There are so many “pinners” who are sharing their educational tools and resources to others. I continue to find new ideas each time I go on the site. I am looking forward to using these online professional development tools in the upcoming school year.

Part III:

As the school year starts up I know that I will have a hectic schedule. So I need to make sure that I am keeping up with my professional development. I’d like to be able to read a few articles each week via twitter or blogs to further my growth as a teacher. Even reading articles that contradict with my views can help me learn more about myself as a teacher and reading about new topics can just further my knowledge. For me, this will probably show up on a to-do list somewhere so that I am sure to incorporate it into my schedule. Ideally, I’d like to take part of my prep time to find interesting articles and share them with my colleagues. It’s so much more interesting to be able to discuss new ideas and bounce them off of people that I teach with.

I think that a true success of my implementation plan would be student engagement and the learning of those 21st century skills. If my students are engaged in their learning and they are taking important lessons away from it then I would call that successful. A checklist will be extremely helpful when determining success for my students. I would have multiple things on there, along with student names, to check off when I see that the student has met that 21st century learning skill. The skills that I would be most observing would be things like: curiosity, adaptability, collaboration, effective oral communication, analyzing information and imagination. This will be an easy tool for me to have and walk around with while marking things as I observe students working individually and with their groups.

There is also always the chance that my implementation plan could not work at all. If this is the case and my plan seems to not be working then I need to be able to be flexible enough to change it in a way where my students will benefit from the new plan. A 21st century learning skill for our students is that they need to be adaptable when a problem arises; just like my students, I need to be able to come up with another solution for the plan if it should fail. What a great lesson to teach my students as I model being adaptable to a situation and coming up with another way to approach the situation. My first graders could really use that skill when something happens and their first plan didn’t turn out as planned!

Part IIII:

While researching my Web 2.0 tools I came across an article that had been posted on NEA’s (National Education Association) website. It speaks to the fact that as teachers, we can use Twitter to stay in touch with other educators and create online networks. “By following other educators’ tweets, teachers can keep up with the latest trends, news, and happenings in education, as well as communicate with fellow educators” (NEA, 2013). As a younger teacher I see the benefits of being on Twitter so that I can search for mentoring and coaching regarding my classrooms from fellow educators (NEA, 2013). It’s almost unreal to think that there are so many people out there who are willing to share their ideas with you and only by typing a tweet. Before Twitter, teachers had very little opportunity to collaborate with other educators outside of their building/district. Now with Twitter, teachers have an endless supply of colleagues that are willing to collaborate and share what they have found (Leoni, 2012).

While researching 21st century learning and ways it is used in a classroom, I came across a quote that says, “We want students to be practicing the 4 C’s: communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking. They should be producing content, not just consuming it passively” (Watson, 2013). Isn’t this really what teachers want? We want our students to do all of those things but sometimes we decide to take the easy way and teach the way that we were taught. We need to make it relevant, develop our student’s thinking skills and teach them how to learn in this world that we are living in (Saavedra, 2012). It is no longer enough to teach the same old way, we cannot keep doing what we always have done and expect new and different results (Magana & Frenkel, 2009).

Many of the articles on 21st century learning talk about connecting students to their world and bridging the gap between how they learn at school and how they learn everywhere else (Magana & Frenkel, 2009). We as teachers need to enable students to communicate with others, learn from others and share their own ideas at their own developmental levels. Technology can help us do that. If we have these technologies incorporated into our classrooms then we are opening the doors to all sorts of differentiation and are able to help our students get what they need (Jukes, 2013). We also need to educate them on how to learn on their own. There are so many resources out there that allow students to learn a wide range of content and skills, but we need to teach them how they learn and how to learn in a world that has all of these opportunities (Saavedra, 2012).

I have learned throughout the articles that just by adding one or two tools into your classroom can set you up on a path towards 21st century learning. “There is no one right way to teach 21st century skills or integrate technology in the classroom. You can pick and choose the things that make the most sense for you and your students” (Jukes, 2013). Reading this really helped relieved some anxiety I was having about having change my whole teaching process around to incorporate 21st century learning. I know realize that taking the small steps towards a 21st century classroom will produce a result bigger then changing nothing at all.

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